

CONNECTICUT CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

134 FARMINGTON AVENUE

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06105-3784

MICHAEL C. CULHANE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DEACON DAVID W. REYNOLDS
LEGISLATIVE LIAISON

Testimony for the Judiciary Committee

Wednesday, March 4, 2009

On HB 6578, An Act Concerning the Penalty for a Capital Felony

My name is Michael C. Culhane and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Catholic Conference. I am here today to support the passage of Raised Bill No. 6578, An Act Concerning the Penalty for a Capital Felony.

The Connecticut Catholic Conference supports this legislation basically because the moral teachings of the Catholic Church mandate that we must respect all life from conception to natural death. It is for this reason that the Conference has always advocated for the abolition of the death penalty and I would like to share with you some of our thoughts in the hope that you might use them to re-examine your own thinking on this very difficult and contentious issue.

In discussing this subject, I wish to make clear at the outset that we are deeply concerned for the just and fair treatment of all parties in this matter – from the victims, to their families, to those who have been accused of grave crimes, and to those who have been convicted of them. While criminals who constitute a serious danger to the well being of other citizens must be impeded from their criminal activities, justice is not always served when the rights of anyone – victims or transgressors – are compromised in any manner.

In the recent past, highly publicized court cases have raised serious doubts in the minds of many about the effectiveness of our criminal justice system in detecting

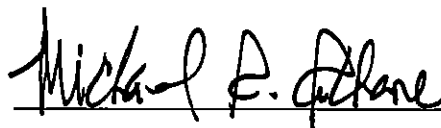
the true nature of crimes that have been committed, and in protecting the rights of those who have been accused of them. Aware of the very fallible nature of our criminal justice system, we are deeply concerned about the possibility of the State calling for the execution of an individual who is, in reality, innocent.

Additionally, we are not comfortable with the fact that so many of those in prisons today – and on death row – are poor, young, and minorities, and therefore, less likely than others to be able to avail themselves of effective legal talent to defend themselves within our court system.

We are also mindful of the fact that there is a growing conviction among experts in the field of criminal justice that such means of punishment as life imprisonment and long-term sentences can be as strong deterrents to crime as capital punishment itself.

We also wish to make clear that, in accordance with the teaching of Pope John Paul II, our respect of human life must be “profoundly consistent.” Consequently, those of us who serve as advocates for the elimination of the death penalty must also oppose all other threats to human life such as abortion, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, as well as the ill-considered cuts in social service programs which might harm the poor, the sick and the elderly.

In conclusion, while conceding that the state has the duty and obligation to maintain public order – as well as the right to punish convicted criminals – the Connecticut Catholic Conference must express its support to abolish the death penalty in the State of Connecticut.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Michael C. Culhane", written over a horizontal line.

Michael C. Culhane

Executive Director